Phoenix Historical Society
Organized in 1998; Opened in 1999

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Inside this issue:

Mary McKay…, cont	2
Did You Know?	2
Board Members	2
Phoenix Recollections	3
Early Phoenix Photos	3
Museum Happenings	4

Middle Aged Mary

Older Mary

Mary Ann McKay Herron Brown Johnson's Story

Mary's story is a rather uncommon one, given that she was a widow shortly after her first marriage, and was made to leave the home she had lived in while married to her husband, and then struggled for most of the rest of her life to survive, care for her children and grandchildren, and rest when it was over. It wasn't 'over' for a very long time.

Mary McKay was born in a log cabin in Alpena, Michigan on the last day of January in 1888. Mary did well enough in school to become trained to be a teacher. She was able to teach by the time she was 18. By 1907, she and Elmer Cleveland Herron were married and they lived on his family's farm. Her years married to Elmer were happy ones, and three children were raised, Ivan Elmer, born in 1908, Arthur Clayton, born in 1909, and Inez Ann, born in 1911.As she had her children, she might have found it difficult to maintain her teaching position, but she had help from her mother-in-law, Catherine, who loved the new grandchildren in her home, and took care of them as much as possible. Mary was able to teach and bring in a little income to help the family. And her children were well educated, thanks to her being able to teach all the grades up to high school classes. Unfortunately, in December of 1915, Elmer died from injuries suffered as a youngster, leaving Mary alone with her three children and her mother-in-law on the farm. Catherine's health declined and she was convinced to sell the farm. In early 1918, Mary and her three little children were made to leave the farm and find their own way to survive. The little Herron family moved to Alpena in 1928. It must have been quite a shock to only have lived on a farm, with family surrounding you, then to move to the city, where they knew no one. Mary had always made and mended their clothing so she tried to earn money by being a seamstress. She also managed to teach school for a least one year, with all three of her children in the same school.

By the fall of 1920, on October 27, Mary had remarried in Alpena to George Meldon Brown. At some time, they moved to Detroit, where they began a new life. It wasn't long before Mary found her new life was not going to be a good one, but she was in a situation where she had to persevere, for her children. She gained employment at a garment factory. After 7 long years, Mary filed for a divorce and it was finalized in 1928.

So, in Detroit, she married her next husband, Earl Sharron Johnson June 4, 1927 before her divorce was even final. He was younger than she was and had never been married. On August 28, 1928, the Johnson's first son, and Mary's 4th child, Donald James Johnson, was born. Her new husband was a carpenter, but not too stable. In 1931 after quite a few issues with Earl's losing jobs and not showing up for work when he had a job, they read of the possibility of being able to get great work in Oregon. Mary and Earl opted to try for that work and take baby Donald, and a friend of Earl's. Their car broke down just outside Las Vegas, Nevada. Earl had to get local work and earn enough for them to repair that car or buy another one, and finish the trip to Oregon.

(Continued on Page 2)

Mary Ann McKay Herron Brown Johnson, cont. from Page 1

In May of 1932 the Johnsons did finally arrive in Bandon, Oregon and they were going to manage the local laundry establishment. Soon afterwards, both Arthur and Inez arrived to join them there. The only family member missing was Ivan, who was to arrive later. In 1933, Mary found out she was pregnant again, that ended her 'career' as the laundry person and they then moved to manage a boarding house in Coquille, Oregon. Earl Jr. was born in January of 1934. A while later, a fire broke out in the boarding house and they were forced to evacuate. This may have been the reason for their next move to Medford in 1937. Ivan arrived and stayed with Mary. During that time, Earl Sr. and Ivan worked at the orchards.

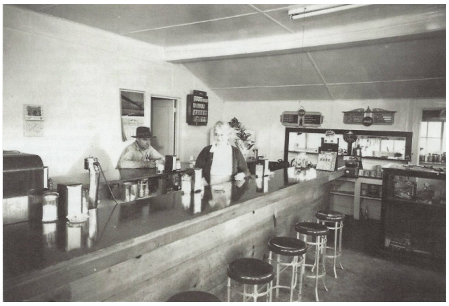
They moved to Phoenix, Oregon house in 1939 or 1940 into a large house that had been given to Earl in payment for services rendered by a Medford business owner for remodeling a meat and food market. They first added a fruit stand to the front of the house, then made sack lunches for orchard workers,

In the early 1940s, during the beginning of the war, things went very well for Mary. She was able to make a decent income, and her family was doing well also. In the 1940 census, Earl Sr. was the head of the household, Mary was working as a 'housekeeper' at Camp White. All was going well enough, Mary was confident that she would be able to make it on her own, so in 1942, she filed for divorce. It looks as though Earl Sr. may have been watching to insure that she was going to be ok, but making plans to move on with his own single life. Throughout the early 1940s, he helped her remodel the house so that they had a place to live in and also a business and later added the café, which was named Mary's Café. It was also the bus stop and Mary was a ticket agent. In October of 1946 Mary leased the restaurant to new owners from Iowa and tried to give up that business. However, they were not a good choice and she was back in the restaurant business again. In 1949 Mary leased the restaurant portion of her building to Mrs. Glen Peterson. At that time the restaurant was called 'Fay's Café.' Mary retained the position of ticket agent for the Greyhound Bus service there. But her income was now mostly from the lease of the restaurant and working full time in food service at Camp White.

In 1957/1958 Mary and Ivan moved to Oakland to live with Earl Jr. Mary had put all her things in storage and sold the restaurant building. It was time to move on and she never looked back. Another move was made to San Jose.

Mary passed away in 1966 just one day short of her 76th birthday. Mary worked hard all her life. She was there, from beginning to end, to support her family and protect them, and she did a wonderful job.

Thanks to *Herron Flights*, Mar Apr 2022. and Earl Johnson Jr.



Mary's Café, Phoenix, Oregon , November 1947

Did You Know?

A classic American concession was first fried in Oregon: the corn dog

You see them at festivals and fairs across the country. At sporting events. At concession stands for any occasion, really. They're an American classic--corn dogs. And it may surprise you that the beloved fried food on a stick was invented at the Oregon Coast along Highway 101 in Rockaway Beach, an offbeat roadside attraction can't be missed. Drivers likely do a double-take at the sight of a giant corn dog on the roof. It's a massive fiberglass corn dog. A Pronto Pup, to be exact.

It was on Labor Day 1939 that George Boyington, who ran a hot dog stand in Rockaway Beach with his wife, had an idea as he sat with overstocked stale buns. What about a batter that could be cooked on demand?

The Original Pronto Pup first opened in 2016, as an homage to the culinary creation invented in town roughly eight decades earlier.

Diane Langer, co-owner of The Original Pronto Pup

Phoenix Historical Society Board Members

Dick Croly: President

Dave Hodson: Vice President

Dorothy Cotton: Secretary

Dorothy Cotton: Treasurer

Lorraine Sexton

Donna Ulrich

Phoenix Recollections, 1886

While at Phoenix we of course noted many old "landmarks" common to vision during our residence in that cozy little hamlet fourteen years ago; but when we think of the changes in that time, our heart almost ceases to beat within us. Many graves have been made upon that hill yonder, changing greatly the scenes around many hearthstones. But the old mill "grinds away" as if nothing had happened, and the water in the old mill-race flows on towards its level just as it did when we were in the habit of meeting those near and dear friends gone before us, and when we nursed the departed little one on our knee. These are all common lessons taught us by the cycle of time, before which we are as frail as a blade of grass.

Dan Lavenburg and family still conduct the only hotel in the place, and to say the least, the table is one of the very best in Oregon.

Dunlap and family continue their residence in the old town, engaged as before in the blacksmith business, together with a stock of hardware and agricultural implements too numerous to mention.

Grandma Stout and little Willie still live just across the street from the old home, but the old gentleman lies silent on the hill.

Samuel Colver and wife, and widow Colver, still remain as of yore. Dad Little is still there. P.W. Olwell & Sons runs the old mill by the creek, making the best flour in Southern Oregon. New machinery having been placed in this mill, together with the reputation it has and the everlasting water power, makes it valuable property.

The old Press Anderson house still stands, having outlived its owner. The old school house survives, together with our own old home and many other familiar buildings, and the old mills still wear their old signs.

In the midst of all the familiar scenes we look around for the people, but many of them are gone.

W.J. Wimer, "Editorial Notes and News," *Rogue River Courier*, Grants Pass, December 10, 1886.

Shared by Dorothy Cotton and Ben Truwe.

Phoenix Photos of Yesteryear Shared by Gwen Pettey

Phoenix, Oregon, street view;.Store, meat market, horse and buggy, and people along muddy street; 'GREETING FROM PHOENIX ORE.'

Road between Talent and Phoenix heading north with hill on left side; large white house and barn on left; road lined with rail fences and power poles ca. 1915

Phoenix, Oregon, street view . Buggy on dirt street. 1913

Horse and buggy on street across from store . 1906

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Telephone (541) 512-0614

Open Thursday, Friday, Saturday
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Any historical information regarding Phoenix would be much appreciated by anyone receiving this newsletter. Please send to above address or editor.

You can be a member of Phoenix Historical Society for just $10.00 a year per person. Join now and help preserve the history of Phoenix and the surrounding area.
Regular PHS meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of each month at

Museum Happenings

THANKS goes to Ken Kantor who took it upon himself the hazardous task of removing the accumulated pine needles from the museum's roof and disposing of them.
And THANKS to Dave Hodson for successfully fixing the lock on our front door that even the Key Man couldn't fix.

More early photos of Phoenix shared by Gwen Pettey

Annual Picnic
&
Membership Drive

Come join us
Tuesday, September 12th at
6:00 pm INDOORS at the
Phoenix Museum.

Bring a dish to share and
your own table service.
Drinks will be provided.